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SUBJECT: ONGOING MARITIME DISPUTE BETWEEN HONDURAS AND NICARAGUA MAY BE ON THE PATH TO RESOLUTION

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 652

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 606

[1](#)1. (U) Nicaraguan and Honduran military authorities recently deemed ongoing territorial disputes between the two nations in the process of resolution, according to press reports. Nicaraguan GEN Javier Carrion articulated his commitment to resolving maritime disputes peacefully, as well as to fostering a constructive means of communicating disagreements between both countries. In response, head of the Honduran armed forces, GEN Jose Barahona, affirmed that relations have improved in the region, due in part to the recent commitment of Central American countries to resolving maritime and land disputes through instruments of international mediation.

[1](#)2. (U) The maritime disagreement between both countries stems from controversy over competing claims to maritime territory and their exclusive economic zones in the countries' Pacific and Caribbean coasts. One flash point is fishing rights. Nicaragua has alleged that Hondurans have been illegally fishing in the Gulf of Fonseca, whose waters are shared by Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador. Diplomatic tensions came to a head in November 1999 when Honduras signed an agreement with Colombia in the Caribbean which Nicaraguan authorities claimed led to the usurping of 130,000 square km of Nicaraguan maritime territory. In response, Nicaragua imposed a 35 percent tariff on Honduran-made products and sued Honduras in the International Court of Justice. Nicaragua finally revoked its retaliatory tariff on Honduran products in March of this year.

[1](#)3. (U) General Carrion recently announced that Nicaragua would await the International Court of Justice's decision on the Caribbean maritime border dispute, expected in 2004. Likewise, General Barahona articulated his support for the process and his hope that international mediation would foster closer relations between the Central American countries.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: The good news here is that there is an obvious channel of communication between the two military chiefs. However, many members of the Honduran armed forces remain deeply suspicious of Nicaraguan intentions. In addition, GEN Carrion's public commentary also highlights the need for a clearer delineation of maritime borders in the Gulf of Fonseca through the use of buoys. Despite his positive stance, GEN Carrion warned that Honduran and El Salvadoran fishermen who crossed illegally into Nicaraguan waters would be detained. Honduran officials tell EmbOffs that this is exactly the kind of Nicaraguan enforcement action in the gulf that normally exacerbates tensions. End Comment.
Palmer